

I submit the article by Ambassador Asmerom into the RECORD at this point.

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A TALE OF TWO INDEPENDENCE DAYS

(By Girma Asmerom)

When Americans celebrate their Independence Day on July 4, they commemorate 227 years of struggle to create a free and prosperous society. The fruits of that struggle are here around us, to observe and to enjoy.

America did not emerge from British colonial rule fully formed as a complete, liberal, democratic state. The outcome of the American Revolution was not a foregone conclusion on July 4, 1776, and even after the peace treaty with Britain was signed in 1783, it was unclear whether the 13 colonies along the eastern seaboard would continue to exist in harmony.

The American Constitution (1789) and the Bill of Rights (1791) laid the foundations for a free society. But bumps along the road were sure to come, and they did. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 threatened the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment (freedoms not fully clarified through the judicial process until after World War I). The War of 1812 threatened a loss of independence through invasion by the former colonial power, Great Britain. And although the Declaration of Independence clearly stated that "all men are created equal," slavery did not end until the U.S. Civil War was fought and half a million Americans died in it.

Every American, no doubt, can relate a favorite story from American history that shows how, through trial and error, the United States has evolved—through blood, sweat, toil, and tears, as Winston Churchill put it in another context—making Independence Day celebrations that much more precious.

Imagine, then, what it must be like to live in a country that has been independent of foreign domination for only a few years—to be precise, twelve years.

That is what it is like for my country, Eritrea. After successive colonization by Turkey (1557–1865), Egypt (1865–1884), Italy (1890–1941), Britain (1942–1952), and Ethiopia (1952–1991), we commemorated 12 years of independence just a few weeks ago, on May 24.

Tor three relentless decades, the Eritrean people fought for independence against Ethiopian occupation and incredible odds without any assistance from governments or outside forces. We achieved self-determination through a U.S.-supervised referendum in 1993. We are developing a democratic system in keeping with the values of our people and with their full support. We have indeed taken measures to protect our national security, as is our right—indeed, our obligation to our people. We are proud of the achievements of our country over a little more than a decade.

In that time, Eritrea has challenged the scourge of developing countries, government corruption, which is, admittedly, endemic in much of Africa. I am happy to report that the U.S. Department of State pointed out in 1998: "Corruption is not a significant barrier or hindrance to investment or trade in Eritrea." The distinguished Canadian journalist, Peter Worthington, added: "... while [Eritrea is] the world's newest independent state (1993) and one of Africa's poorest countries, it's also the safest, least corrupt, most self-reliant."

Like the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Eritrea has spent the past dozen years emerging from the strangulation of Soviet-backed Ethiopian occupation. Like the United States in its formative years, six years after its independence, under the pretext of border conflict, Eritrea suffered inva-

sion by its former colonial overlord (Ethiopia), leading to the death of 120,000 Ethiopians and 19,000 Eritreans, as well as displacement of countless families. This war also brought massive economic destruction to both countries.

One of our major challenges is the current unprecedented famine. This is a temporary situation brought about as a consequence of a complete failure of rains last year, in addition to the dislocation resulting from Ethiopia's invasion. To overcome these circumstances, the Government of Eritrea and its people, with the assistance of the international community, are exerting relentless efforts. More can be done, of course, but we are doing the best we can with limited resources.

Success will come. We have as our model Eritrea's achievements in public health. The U.S. Agency for International Development notes: "Despite Eritrea's rank as one of the poorest countries in the world, it ranks 31st in healthy life expectancy." Eritrea has one of Africa's lowest rates of HIV/AIDS infection, only 2 to 2.5 percent; it has eradicated polio; and in 2002, it reduced malaria in children under five by half.

Eritreans, dedicated to their tested vision, as a matter of policy refuse to look for foreign economic assistance to bring economic development. We seek trade and investment, not handouts from our partners and taxpayers. Eritrean-Americans living in communities across the United States are natural lines of communication between our two countries and peoples, encouraging further engagement and future U.S.-Eritrean commercial ties.

Americans have much to celebrate on the Fourth of July. We Eritreans take this opportunity to salute and congratulate the American people on their Independence Day.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO FRANK MARTINEZ

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 25, 2003

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise before this body of Congress today to recognize Frank Martinez for his courageous act which saved the life of Kelly McNeil. The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission awarded Frank a Bronze Medal in recognition of the risk and valor he displayed in this selfless act. I am proud to join my colleagues here today in applauding Frank for his heroic action.

Kelly McNeil was fishing on San Luis Lake with his family when he suddenly fell from his boat into the lake. After an unsuccessful rescue attempt by Kelly's son, Frank swam 600 feet out into the lake to rescue Kelly. Frank proceeded to position Kelly on his back to keep him above water and then made his way back to shore. Thanks to Frank's heroism, Kelly recovered quickly after receiving treatment for hypothermia.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize Frank before this body of Congress today. His brave act serves as a reminder to all Americans of the courage upon which our great nation is founded. I congratulate Frank on the prestigious award that has been bestowed upon him and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

HONORING THE LIFE OF STUART FINLEY

HON. TOM DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 25, 2003

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of my good friend, Mr. Stuart Finley.

Present-day Northern Virginia is characterized by swaths of economic and residential growth, traffic, and the frenetic pace of those eager to get ahead. But amid this hustle and bustle lies the unique community of Lake Barcroft—a place that holds a special place in my heart and in the hearts of all of those lucky enough to have lived along its shores.

Lake Barcroft is a man-made lake located in the vicinity of Seven Corners area of Northern Virginia, offering an oasis of peace and tranquility in an otherwise busy suburban region. As with many such places, the work of a few dedicated souls has been instrumental in creating and maintaining the special flavor so many now enjoy.

Stuart Finley was such an individual. A man whose dedication and industry were instrumental in making Lake Barcroft the special place it is today, and without whom the lake might not even exist.

Over a span of almost fifty years, Stuart dedicated innumerable hours to projects involving the lake. He was an early president of the Lake Barcroft Community Association, then later served as chairman of the engineering committee. But through the numerous positions with different organizations, perhaps the most fitting title for Stuart was "community problem solver." Be it organizing dredging projects or the purchase of the lake itself, Stuart was intimately involved.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, as a resident of Lake Barcroft, I wish to express my gratitude to Stuart Finley and pay tribute to his lifetime of community service. Northern Virginia is a better place due to his efforts, and I appreciate this opportunity to express my regret at his passing.

IN RECOGNITION OF JULY 26 DAY—LIBERIAN INDEPENDENCE

HON. DONALD M. PAYNE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 25, 2003

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to mark the 156th anniversary of Liberian independence. On July 26, 1847 a young African American man from Virginia named Joseph Jenkins Roberts declared the colony of Liberia in West Africa an independent republic. The anniversary of this great day provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the history and progress of this nation. The recent civil strife and the impending humanitarian disaster add a sense of urgency to our thoughts.

In 1820, the American Colonization Society founded the Republic of Liberia, with a grant from President James Monroe as a place to send free Black Americans. Over the years, freed slaves and their offspring continued to settle in this small West-African state. In 1847, the people of Liberia declared their independence. They gave their country a flag and a

constitution modeled on that of the United States.

However, independence did not spell the end of Liberia's close historical links with the United States. American companies, such as the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company, have played an important role in shaping the Liberian economy. Liberia has been an important political ally of the United States. During the two World Wars, the republic allowed the United States to station troops on its soil. As the Cold War reached its peak, a mutual defense pact was signed and the United States built communications facilities to relay a "Voice of America" signal throughout the continent.

Unfortunately, the progress that Liberia made over the years has been spoiled by over a decade of civil war. The war has claimed the lives of 300,000 people, and has recently intensified, causing a humanitarian disaster on a large scale. A half of the population has been forced to flee their homes. Disease, death and destruction have become everyday elements of Liberian life.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleagues in the House will agree that immediate action is imperative in Liberia. Every day that we delay intervention, more lives are lost. The people of Liberia call out for our help. We have a moral obligation to act. Plans for a multinational peacekeeping force led by the United States in conjuncture with troops from the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States have been suggested. I am pleased to note that the President announced this morning that the United States will be positioning our military forces off the coast of Liberia to begin the process of assisting in this situation. My only hope is that this offer of assistance will soon be translated into practical concrete aid.

Let us give the people of Liberia something to celebrate this Independence Day. Let us help this great people recover the liberty from which their country takes its name. Let Liberia live!

IN RECOGNITION OF DIANE FURNAS, NEWLY ELECTED CHAIRWOMAN OF THE BOARD OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FEDERAL CREDIT UNIONS

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 25, 2003

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Diane Furnas, chief executive officer of Southwest Airlines Federal Credit Union in Dallas, TX. Ms. Furnas has recently been elected Chairwoman of the Board of the National Association of Federal Credit Unions (NAFCU).

Ms. Furnas' dedication to the credit union movement is illustrated by her thirty years of service to the credit union community, including more than 27 years in her current position as the CEO of Southwest Airlines FCU. Ms. Furnas has spent the last three years as the Vice-Chair of NAFCU and she is the first woman elected to chair the NAFCU Board.

Throughout her tenure at Southwest Airlines FCU, Ms. Furnas has worked diligently to ensure her credit union's 28,000 members have

access to high quality financial expertise. As a member of the Board at NAFCU, Ms. Furnas has been equally diligent in advocating the goals of the credit union community as a whole. From financial literacy to predatory lending and identity theft, Ms. Furnas has ensured that America's 82 million credit union members have a voice here in the nation's capitol. I am certain she will carry on that good work in her role as Chairwoman of NAFCU.

NAFCU is the only national trade association that exclusively represents the interests of America's federal credit unions and Ms. Furnas will—no doubt—serve with distinction in her new post. I would like to congratulate Ms. Furnas on her election and wish her the best of luck.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. ZOE LOFGREN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 25, 2003

Ms. LOFGREN. Mr. Speaker, as the House prepares to go out on recess, I leave dumbfounded by many of the actions this House has taken in these last days. Last night, this Republican led House took the first steps in the destruction of an important program whose aim is to help the children of low income parents be better prepared to succeed when they go to school and ultimately succeed in their lives. Instead of making these changes that can only hurt this program, we should have been working together, regardless of party, to strengthen a program that has served so many children so well for almost forty years. Many in this House talk a great game about being "Compassionate Conservatives". What they did last night to Head Start was neither.

If this was the only mistake we were going to make this week, it would be one thing. Yet today, this House is poised to step up its attack on the lives and hopes of our most precious resource, the young people of this country. President Bush often speaks about the need to expand another program that directly benefits many of our younger constituents. That program is AmeriCorps.

President Bush often speaks about his respect and devotion to the concept of national service. Indeed in his last two State of the Union addresses and in numerous speeches around the country, this president has urged Americans to devote time and energy to community projects. In issuing this challenge he pledged his best efforts to expand government programs of national service.

It is difficult to understand how the main instrument of such service—the AmeriCorps program—could possibly be allowed to shrink on his watch. Indeed, the program is wildly popular among many local and faith-based agencies that often place AmeriCorps workers to help organize and coordinate local volunteers. We know that governors and mayors of both parties praise AmeriCorps daily. When President Bush was Governor Bush he often praised AmeriCorps.

Yet today, this House will be asked to approve a supplemental spending package that contains no additional funding for AmeriCorps. I wonder why President Bush has not used his

leadership skills to convince his Republican colleagues that having a vibrant, properly funded AmeriCorps is indeed vital to our national interest.

If these two actions were not bad enough, today we will vote on a bill that dramatically skimps on programs for Americans who have answered our country's call to arms, our proud veterans. We should never break our promises to veterans. This VA-HUD Appropriations bill will not meet our veterans' needs. Its increase from last year is \$1.4 billion, and does not even keep pace with hospital inflation or the growth in the numbers of veterans enrolled.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my fellow Americans know that an average of 200,000 veterans are forced to wait six months or more for an appointment at Veterans Administration hospitals. Some even die before they get to see a doctor. A new report, released by the American Legion this month reminds this Congress that veterans are waiting six months or more for medical care, as the overburdened Veterans Affairs health system fails to keep pace with an ever growing demand. All members of this House should be ashamed to face veterans when we return to our districts for considering this awful budget for our veterans.

Even the President's own Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans acknowledged the problem, stating "there is persistent concern about the inability of VA to provide care to enrolled veterans . . ."

The President's Task Force also noted that "the Federal Government has been more ambitious in authorizing veteran access to health care than it has been in providing the funding necessary to match declared intentions."

The VA-HUD bill that we will consider today contains a very disappointing but not surprising outcome for housing programs. Appropriators assert that if anyone is to blame it is HUD for an inadequate request, but Congress approved the budget request after hearing from advocates that the Department's request was inadequate.

This bill provides inadequate funding to address rising housing costs and the increasing number of low income people who are unable to afford a home. Funding for the Housing Choice Voucher program will not fully fund all vouchers currently in use. Two of the President's much-touted initiatives were not fully funded: The American Dream Downpayment initiative received only \$125 million of the \$200 million the President had requested, and his Samaritan Housing Initiative received no funding at all.

While public housing programs would receive slightly more than what the President requested we know that the funding needed for capital needs remains wholly inadequate, given the \$20 billion estimated backlog in capital needs.

I am happy that the HOME production and rental assistance program was increased by \$77 million from last year's funding level. Unfortunately, the committee lacked the funds needed to match the Administration's request of \$2.2 billion, instead funding the program at \$2.064 billion.

Mr. Speaker, in this time of increasing unemployment and economic turmoil, more people need our help in making certain that they have the opportunity to live in a home they can afford. Yet for some reason, this House is